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LETTER OF SENATOR JAMES ROOD DOOLITTLE¹

CHICAGO, ILL., April 16, 1880.

Gen'l C. A. Dana.

MY DEAR SIR:

Yours of the 12th is duly received for which I thank you most sincerely.

I agree with you that the name of John M. Palmer, if he could be nominated as the Democratic candidate, would probably lead us to victory over Gen'l Grant.

But let me tell you the difficulties in the way of his nomination. If, as is probable, the health of Mr. Tilden is such that he cannot be a candidate, let me say to you that the reason why Gen'l Palmer will not probably be nominated lies in the fact which neither you nor I can control, viz.; that the Illinois delegation cannot be united upon him. Many of the leading Democrats of this state will never forget nor forgive him because, like you and me, he acted with the Republican party during the war. Many others are committed to Col. Morrison, and many others are committed to the nomination of David Davis; and to his nomination Judge Trumbull will not consent.

It is the same eternal trouble growing out of the selfish wish of men to lead, to disorganization and defeat, rather than by self-sacrificing patriotism, to unite and organize a victory. It is the same thing which scourges New York, and causes all your troubles there.

Instead of saying all for the cause nothing for men; it is all the time *aut Caesar aut nullus*. When that spirit prevails as much

¹ This letter is copied by the contributor from what appears to be a rough draft of a letter to the late Charles A. Dana, at the time of its writing the editor of the *New York Sun*. The handwriting in the letter in question is clearly that of the late ex-Senator Doolittle of Wisconsin. Of that fact there is not the possibility of a doubt. Whether or not the letter was ever sent may be more doubtful. As the entire "tone and tenor" of the letter comports exactly with what is believed to have been the sentiments of Judge Doolittle at that time, it is safe to say that the letter was sent, although the correspondence in the possession of the contributor does not disclose any reply by Mr. Dana. There are several political letters from Mr. Dana in the Doolittle correspondence, although they do not refer to this particular letter.

The letter is exceedingly interesting because the author of it was, at the time of its writing, familiar with all of the political facts with which it deals. Senator Doolittle was, moreover, a national figure of no mean proportions. Few public men were more widely known or more generally sought in the political campaigns of the period covered by this letter. We may, or we may not, agree with all that Mr. Doolittle chose to say about men and measures. But he was an intelligent and interested observer of current political events.—DUANE MOWRY.

as it now does in democratic councils, east and west, we cannot achieve victory; we hardly deserve victory.

Now, let me call to mind what has occurred four times in succession. In 1864, if the Democratic party had, by its platform, declared for the Union and for a more vigorous prosecution of the war, instead of declaring for "peace at any price," McClellan would have been president instead of Mr. Lincoln. You and I were then for the Republican party and for Mr. Lincoln; and against McClellan and the Democratic party; because the Republican party and Mr. Lincoln were right; and the Democratic party, and McClellan, in spite of his letter of acceptance, which struggled to set him right, were wrong. Had the Democrats then nominated Gen'l Dix upon a Union platform, he would have beaten Mr. Lincoln as certain as the election was held. But the Vallandighams would not allow that.

In 1868, Mr. Seymour, who, in spite of repeated declinations to accept, accepted the nomination, was defeated by Gen'l Grant, though a majority of the people did not want Gen'l Grant for president. It was because Mr. Seymour presided at that convention of 1864, which passed that suicidal platform of surrender to the Rebellion. In that convention of 1868, had a war Democrat been nominated, Gen'l Grant would never have been elected president.

I speak of what I know, for I stood upon the border line of parties then. I had lately presided over the Union Convention of Philadelphia, and from all quarters, by letters and otherwise, knew the feelings and aspirations of that great mass of conscientious men, who seek for truth, and follow the dictates of duty and patriotism wherever they lead, rather than obey the mere behests of party. I was then in the van, leading the War Democrats and Liberal Republican masses into alliance with the Democratic party and to the support of Mr. Seymour because the Democratic party was right upon the issues of 1868. You may, or you may not, call to mind the letter to Ostrander of Pennsylvania in which I appealed to them to come earnestly to the support of Mr. Seymour. I was in the canvass from the beginning to the end. I helped bear its burdens in several of the states;

and I tell you only what I know, that the mill stone on Mr. Seymour's neck, and which dragged him under, was not his speech to the New York rioters; but the fact that he presided over that Convention of 1864, which passed those resolutions.

Had Chase been nominated in 1868 (but Pendleton and others in Ohio would not consent to that), or had a War Democrat, English, of Connecticut, or Parker, of New Jersey, been nominated, he would have been elected, and Grant never would have been president. But this same rivalry and selfishness defeated us then, and forced the nomination of Seymour with a load upon his back too heavy for us to carry; and Grant was elected.

Again in 1872, when a very large portion of Liberal Republicans left the Grant party, and the Democratic party magnanimously said to them, if you will hold a Convention and nominate a candidate we will back you with all our power.

The same spirit of rivalry in the State of Illinois defeated us again, in the Liberal Republican Convention at Cincinnati. Trumbull, Davis and Palmer all had friends, uncompromising friends. Neither would yield or consent that the Illinois delegation at the Liberal Republican Convention at Cincinnati should unite on either. The result of this same selfish, unsacrificing spirit prevented the nomination of a candidate who would have been elected as certain as the revolutions of the earth; that forced the nomination of Mr. Greeley. If David Davis had been nominated at Cincinnati in 1872 for president and Horace Greeley for vice-president, they would have been supported by the Convention at Baltimore over which I presided; and at the polls by the whole rank and file of the Democratic party. Davis would have then carried Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, probably Wisconsin, and perhaps Pennsylvania. He would have carried New York, also.

But Mr. Greeley, while he was right upon the great question of Peace between the North and the South, and did all in his power to lead both to "shake hands over the bloody chasm," had, unfortunately all his life, done little else than abuse the Democratic Party; its men and its measures; and, so bitterly,

too, that thousands upon thousands, (although the great mass of its leaders and rank and file forgot and forgave it all and supported him heart and soul) shrank from the polls and did not vote at all; and thus Gen'l Grant was elected a second time as president.

Again in 1876, Mr. Tilden was nominated and was elected; but, unfortunately, he was elected by the votes of the South, mainly.

Had the Convention at St. Louis in the platform, only inserted a resolution, which I begged and implored them to do, to re-monetize the silver dollar; a measure which after the election, the public voice demanded in tones so loud that more than three-fourths of Congress voted for it; and which was carried over the president's veto, a measure by which alone we would have been able to resume specie payments. Mr. Tilden would have carried Illinois, and Ohio and Wisconsin, as well as New York and Indiana. The question of Solid South versus Solid North would have forever disappeared from our political struggles. There would have been no returning boards; no threat of civil war; no calling of armies, or of gunboats to help inaugurate a president who was never elected in March, 1877, at Washington; no Electoral Commission of 8 to 7, whereby a president, never elected, was put into office; and made a legal president; just as a child, bastard born, is made legitimate by the subsequent marriage of the parties.

Would to God some of the spirit of the Old Democratic Republican Party could return to inspire the hearts and guide the councils of the Democratic Convention to come off at Cincinnati in June next.

From the proceedings in Chicago last night at the Grant meeting, at which the only son of Lincoln presided; and young Stephen A. Douglas made a speech; and from the character of the men who called it, and managed it throughout, you may expect Illinois will go for Grant in the Republican Convention. He will be nominated on the first ballot, if not by acclamation.

If Grant is nominated, you may rest assured that there will be little or no substantial withdrawal of republican votes from

his support. There will be no third ticket of any moment in the Northern States. The Tribune here, with all its anti-third term articles, will support him. Its voice already this morning mellows in its tones; and it sees its opposition is likely to be unavailing. It is getting ready to bow to the inevitable. Grant's nomination will be a bitter pill to swallow, but bitter as it may be, they will swallow it; and unless we, on our side, nominate a man whose Union war record is as clear and certain and pronounced as that of Parker, of New Jersey, Hancock, of Pennsylvania, Groesbeck, Ewing, or Payne, of Ohio, Palmer, or Davis, or Trumbull, or Morrison, of Illinois, or Field, of California, his election is a certainty. Either of these gentlemen and others of that stamp, I believe we could elect over Grant.

In my letter to you I spoke of Mr. Parker, of New Jersey; You reply, if Mr. Tilden is not nominated no other eastern man will be. Now, my dear Sir, why could not Parker be nominated? And if nominated, why could not he be elected? Why could not Mr. Tilden, if his health is failing, give his voice and influence for one of these gentlemen, and give us a certain victory?

I hope you will not think I trespass on you by these long letters, written so freely and frankly to a friend, who, like myself, has done the country some service, and has no personal interest, or wish, that is not for the good of our cause, and of our common country.

Will you let me be favored with a still further expression of your views, from your stand point?

This letter you see, of course, is not intended for publication, but it is for free and frank and full consultation with one who is in a position to have a potent voice in shaping the future action of the Democratic party.

Truly yours,

J. R. DOOLITTLE.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Mr. Duane Mowry, the contributor of the above letter, is an enthusiastic admirer of the character and political career of Senator Doolittle. In submitting some other papers Mr. Mowry says: "Senator James Rood Doolittle, for twelve years, from 1857 to 1869, a United

States senator from Wisconsin, was one of the ablest as he was one of the most maligned and persistently misunderstood public men ever sent to Congress from Wisconsin. Not only was his ability of the strictly statesmanlike quality, but his integrity, both officially and in private life, was absolutely unsullied, in spite of the efforts of his political traducers to question and belittle it."

Senator Doolittle, in his career as a public man representing Wisconsin, experienced the embarrassment commonly incident to shifting from one party to another and back again. Beginning as a Democrat and ending his career as a Democrat, he coöperated during the Civil War with the Republican party because of his pronounced anti-slavery views, and was elected a senator from Wisconsin as a Republican. After the assassination of Lincoln and the split between President Johnson and the Republican party, Mr. Doolittle adhered to Johnson and brought down upon himself not merely the wrath of the party but the condemnation of the Wisconsin legislature, which by resolution called upon him, though unavailingly, to resign his senatorship.

Mr. Mowry is in possession of letters written to Senator Doolittle by men prominent in public life, expressing appreciation of his pronouncements on public affairs at critical times. Copies of three of these letters, of which a brief description follows, have been sent by Mr. Mowry to us with a view to their publication. We deem it sufficient to take this means of calling the attention of those interested to the fact that Mr. Mowry is in possession of the letters and that copies may also be found at the State Historical Library.

1. A letter from President Martin B. Anderson of the University of Rochester, under date of February 12, 1866, speaks of Mr. Doolittle's "triumphantly conclusive speech

on the monstrous heresy of state suicide. I can imagine the squirming of Sumner while listening to you," etc.

2. A letter from Lieut. Col. A. S. Daggett, dated Fort Wadsworth, New York, January 19, 1866, requesting a copy of Doolittle's speech delivered in the United States Senate on the seventeenth instant, which evidently refers to the speech praised also by President Anderson.

3. A letter from S. W. Thayer, dated Warsaw, New York, February 3, 1866, thanking Doolittle for his speech and praising it as presenting the "only true theory on which our Union can be restored and maintained."

Students of the character and political career of Senator Doolittle will be interested to know that Mr. Mowry has other Doolittle correspondence in addition to the above.